

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 299 655

CS 506 451

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TITLE The Disempowered Paradigm: or We Are the Sailors and We're in Mutiny--The Safety of This Journey Depends on Unity.
PUB DATE Nov 88
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (74th, New Orleans, LA, November 3-6, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Blacks; Cognitive Processes; *Communication Research; Feminism; Majority Attitudes; Minority Group Influences; Minority Groups; *Models
IDENTIFIERS Epistemic Research; *World View

ABSTRACT

In the last few years there has been much discussion concerning different frameworks-paradigms-perspectives-world views and the ways in which each paradigm affects how knowledge is collected and analyzed. Unfortunately each new paradigm has been positioned in relation to the traditional rationalistic, scientific paradigm. The roots of these discussions come from many perspectives: feminist, critical, and Black. Although the terms to identify each view may differ (theory, perspective, scholarship, or paradigm), there are many similarities between and among the groups. One very obvious similarity, whether it be feminist, critical, or Black, is its view of oppression as a main ingredient in the present paradigm's position of power. These groups then constitute the disempowered, not only in their relative position in society but also in the ways in which they view and collect knowledge. Riane Eisler states that if the system is stable, the new mode of functioning represented by these fluctuations will not survive. But if these innovators multiply fast enough, the whole system may adopt a new mode of functioning. The rules enforced by the empowered paradigm prevent any but another "competing" paradigm from entering the arena. Part of the "disempowered paradigm" is its acceptance of other paradigms--other ways of thinking and viewing. In the field of communication, the acceptance of the disempowered paradigm would see a myriad of radical changes in all areas of study. (Eighteen references are attached.) (RAE)

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THE DISEMPOWERED PARADIGM:
OR
WE ARE THE SAILORS AND WE'RE IN MUTINY -
THE SAFETY OF THIS JOURNEY DEPENDS ON UNITY*

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A paper presented at Speech Communication Association
New Orleans - November 4, 1988

* Near, H. (1982). Speed of Light, California: Redwood Records.

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This paper has gone through many changes and has been a long arduous process. The authors come from varied backgrounds: one from an argumentation, rationalistic, quasi-scientific background and the other from a mass communication, feminist, critical studies background. The basis for the argument came from the senior seminar course in Communication Theories at George Mason University, team taught by the authors. When the course began, we disagreed on many areas concerning communication. This helped student discussion and through the semester we (both faculty and students) began to listen to the arguments. By the end of the semester, we found a few areas in which we agreed, the most important concerned problems with the current scientific paradigm. We found reinforcement not only from within the confines of academics but outside as well. Speakers on alternatives to the present world view spoke in church and environmentalists flagged us with phone calls.

As we look back, the identification of the problem was easy, the bigger barrier was once we decided to write a paper concerning it. Meeting after meeting took place where little was done other than to draw up a new outline. New material from diverse sources reinforced our position but it was very hard to put what was in our heads onto paper. The biggest barrier was the linearity of the language we use and the absence of words with which we were forced to detail our views. We refused to place the new position in relation to the present scientific paradigm yet there was little other way to explain it for the basic ways in which to argue our position were founded on the scientific paradigm. Therefore, we have tried not only to write

out our thoughts but be true to the position itself by NOT positioning it in opposition to the scientific paradigm and NOT putting arguments up for dissection. We have presented our arguments the way we came to them as we sought input from other groups involved in alternative views. There were many times, and some which still haunt us, where we feel we must be reinventing the wheel, that what we have to say is apparent and need not be said. Other times, we are both convinced it is one of the most important pieces we have completed.

In the last few years there has been much discussion concerning different frameworks-paradigms-perspectives-world view and the ways in which each paradigm affects how knowledge is collected and analyzed. Unfortunately each new paradigm has been, necessarily so, positioned in relation to the traditional rationalistic, scientific paradigm. The roots of these discussions come from many perspectives: feminist (Foss and Foss, Treichler), critical (Held), and Black (Richards & Asante). Although the terms to identify each view may differ (theory, perspective, scholarship, or paradigm), there are many similarities between and among the groups. One very obvious similarity, whether it be feminist, critical, or Black, is its view of oppression (for example, based on gender, race, or class) as a main ingredient to the present paradigm's position of power. It is our contention, therefore, that these groups constitute what we have entitled, the disempowered. These groups are disempowered not only in their relative position in society but also in the ways in which they view and collect knowledge. It

is, therefore, the intention of this paper to detail and discuss the various perspectives which collectively make up the disempowered paradigm as well as cite supportive evidence for its existence. Once the similarities and differences of each group have been identified, a solid foundation shall be built, detailing the disempowered paradigm and its relationship to the empowered paradigm and the potential for impact.

FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP

One of the earliest and most active representative groups arguing against what we call the "empowered paradigm" are feminist scholars. In recent years, articles have been published in mainstream communication journals (Rakow, Dervin, Treichler and Wartella in Journal of Communication; Steeves in Critical Studies in Mass Communication) which argue for feminist theory within communication studies. One more recent and less known journal Journal of Communication Inquiry devoted a full issue to feminist theory. In addition, groups within both International Communication Association (Feminist Scholarship Interest Group) and Speech Communication Association (Women's Caucus) have kept the fire hot concerning feminist issues. The latter, in fact, sponsored a panel at the 1987 SCA convention which focused on the issue of Feminist Scholarship. This resulted in a specific issue devoted to the discussion of feminist scholarship in Women's Studies in Communication.

In the opening remarks of this issue, Lois Self states that feminist theory is multi-voiced. The reader soon discovers that, indeed, there are very different perspectives held by those

involved in "feminist scholarship" and what they believe feminist scholarship is...or should be. There is an apparent similarity within them all: the direction to eliminate the oppression of women. That elimination of oppression may be viewed from a more conservative perspective (i.e. the elimination of stereotypes included in social myths) or a more radical perspective which holds that feminist scholarship should be activist in direction.

Self states:

most of us who chose to participate in these discussions over the past two years probably share historian Linda Gordon's definition of feminism as "an analysis of women's subordination for the purpose of figuring out how to change it" (3).

Sonia Foss and Karen Foss in "Incorporating the Feminist Perspective in Communication Scholarship: A Research Commentary," discuss what they term as the "feminist perspective." They characterize the feminist perspective as one that differs from the current dominant research paradigm in the basic category of analysis, what data is appropriate for analysis, and the means for analysis. In addition, the feminist perspective focuses on gender as a critical component of all dimensions of culture: it is a basic category of analysis, not simply another variable.

The feminist perspective's primary goal is the development of theory that unsettles or challenges common assumptions of the culture. The feminist perspective also has a practical, activist dimension as well as an academic one. Feminist scholarship challenges "the application of beliefs and practices of science to human beings and human behavior which includes certain key

characteristics: an emphasis on wholes rather than parts; an emphasis on process rather than structure; an agreement that knowledge is a process of interconnection rather than hierarchy; a push for approximate descriptions rather than absolute truth; and an emphasis on cooperation rather than competition.

Within their discussion of the feminist perspective, Sonia Foss and Karen Foss introduce another perspective, "new paradigm thinking," which shares many characteristics with the feminist perspective.

NEW PARADIGM THINKING

In an issue of ReVision, guest edited by Walter Truett Anderson (political scientist, journalist of social change, politics, and the environment), Ernest Callenbach (scholar in film, art, and natural history), Fritjof Capra (physicist and scholar of social implications of modern science) and Charlene Spretnak (major force in the Green political organization in the United States), a discussion by theorists, strategists, and activists for social change at the Elmwood Institute becomes the basis for a new holistic, ecological and postpatriarchal world view. Capra identifies six common criteria of this "new paradigm." The first two refer to a view of nature: a shift from parts to whole and a move from structure to process. The next four criteria deal directly with the acquisition of knowledge including a shift from "objective" science to "epistemic" science (science no longer separate from human subjectivity) and a shift from building to "network" as a metaphor of knowledge (knowledge no longer built upon other knowledge but interconnected and linked - webbed). The last two

characteristics which deal with knowledge include a shift from truth to approximate descriptions and a shift from domination and control to cooperation and nonviolence.

While the "new paradigm" consists of many characteristics which threaten the scientific paradigm, other scholars in communication hold that critical studies is the "new paradigm". Critical studies, since its interaction with administrative research in the late 1930s has viewed itself in opposition to the present paradigm and in many ways, critical studies shares many of the same characteristics with feminists and "new paradigm" thinkers. There is an emphasis on wholes rather than parts, for cultural studies views the complete culture and does not reduce (i.e. one television series, cartoons aimed at children). In addition, there is an emphasis on the processual nature of knowledge, trying to understand how the culture is connected to various other societal components. Yet other characteristics of critical studies do NOT fall into line with the previous described perspectives. Although critical scholars are very interested in hierarchy, their view of hierarchy is narrow. Class becomes the only issue by which to view hierarchy. In addition, the encouragement of cooperative study is not recognized nor reflected in its scholars. One more subtle difference from the other groups is the implicit, albeit unspoken drive for the ultimate truth.

Many of the previously stated characteristics form the core of what we call the disempowered paradigm. In fact, it is our position that one of the reasons these three groups have similar

characteristics is because each represents a disempowered group.

DISEMPOWERED PARADIGM

The roots of the disempowered paradigm are shared with the three perspectives discussed above and include the following concepts: an emphasis on holistic approaches to understanding phenomena; an emphasis on the processual nature of knowledge; and a rejection of specific hierarchical ordering. While these three characteristics are held in common and have been discussed extensively, there are additional characteristics of the disempowered paradigm which warrant clarification. The first is the valuing of personal information. This characteristic includes the valuing of individual differences and personal experiences, and the valuing of private and public as equal. The second characteristics is the inclusion and acceptance of diverse methods of knowledge acquisition. This includes: the value of cooperation and collaboration in the acquisition of knowledge, the value of non-objective forms of knowledge acquisition; an acceptance that personal bias is intrinsic to the process of knowledge gathering; the utility and, therefore, the retention of non-conforming data; and the recognition of language as power which impedes opposition/ideation.

This paradigm, although we have presented it within a communication context, has substantial support from various other sources such as Black contemporary thought, Chaos theory, and the gylanic movement.

BLACK CONTEMPORARY THOUGHT

Black contemporary thought parallels some of the ideas of disempowered paradigm. There are a number of characteristics in their modes of thinking and approaching the world which are similar. One such characteristic of black thought appears to be an emphasis on "holistic thinking." Asante explains that "...we are fed up with fragmentation and particularization. Ancient Africans believed in the unity of the universe and demonstrated in their daily work the continuity of the sacred and secular, spiritual and material"(18); it is this holistic view which he suggests must be used to explain the world. Asante also indicates that this holistic view is characterized also by a strong sense of "personalism" which is also a characteristic of the disempowered paradigm. Asante continues by addressing the impact of this view on social science when he writes that,

I think it is clear that the social science model we have been living with is not able to produce viable patterns of holistic science, nor is it able to transcend the immanent normative characteristics of Western models. This lack has been evident whether the user of the model has been European or not. The problem is not in the person but in the model, inherently so." (18).

Closely associated with the nature of holistic-systemic thinking is the idea of balance or equilibrium. Richards explains that the rationalist model, as opposed to the Black model of thinking "...presupposes disharmony, disequilibrium, imbalance." Richards argues that Black thought presumes that a "perfect state can ultimately be reached" (62).

An additional commonalty between Black thought and the disempowered paradigm we see developing is the emphasis by African societies on cooperative versus conflict producing

attitudes. Asante suggests that, "It is not the tradition of African societies to see conflict as a method of progress; in fact, societies are made livable and kept that way by removing and keeping out conflict as much as possible" (27).

Richards explains another parallel between the characteristics of the disempowered paradigm when he addresses the notion of hierarchical ordering. He indicates that the rationalist mode of thought which provides the foundation for White self images "requires an inferior to which it relates as superior"(64). The Black modes of thought do not require such a notion of hierarchy.

GYLANIC MOVEMENT

Riane Eisler, a futurist, feminist, attorney and author of The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future, offers a reinterpretation of archeological evidence which offers support for the "disempowered paradigm." Many of the characteristics Eisler identifies as part of the "dominator" (that is the scientific paradigm) are criticized by the groups we have identified as part of the disempowered paradigm. Eisler argues for a return to the "partnership" society which is characterized by a number of concepts similar to the "disempowered paradigm." She urges the re-examination of society from a gender-holistic perspective and argues that the original direction in the mainstream of our cultural evolution was toward partnership, characterized by linking rather than ranking or hierarchy and a diversity that was not equated with inferiority of superiority" (xvii).

Eisler addresses the ramifications of hierarchy as a characteristic of the dominator paradigm, the shift from "defense needs to actualization needs is an important key to the transformation from a dominator to a partnership society" (190).

The partnership paradigm values personal information and nonobjective forms of knowledge, a viewpoint which we find supportive of the disempowered paradigm.

A world view dominated by the partnership paradigm would also exhibit a more cooperative stance. This facet of the paradigm is addressed by Eisler when she writes:

This world system would be governed by a new global ethic based on a greater consciousness of an identification with future as well as present generations and will require that cooperation, rather than confrontation, and harmony with, rather than conquest of, nature becomes our normative ideals (195).

It is of interest to note that Eisler refers to one additional area we have discovered for support of the disempowered paradigm, "chaos theory." A number of similarities exist between chaos and the disempowered paradigm.

CHAOS THEORY

Chaos theory is the study of complex systems which exhibit an amazing amount of randomness which inhibits understanding via currently available methods. Furthermore, it attempts to describe "...systems stability and systems change" (Eisler, p. 59). It refers to the recently emerging body of knowledge, popularly identified with the "new physics" and sometimes called "self-organizing" theory and/or "chaos" theory. .pa

A number of people have proposed that chaos theory may well become the basis of a new social science. David Loye, writing in ReVISION, suggests that social scientific ramifications of chaos theory would be a "science of understanding" and a "science of action" to solve the problems of our time. He states:

As social scientists and as activists, our basic problem seems to be that we are helpless because we are trying to apply sciences, theories, and activist strategies based on equilibrium and near-to-equilibrium models to a far-from-equilibrium or chaotic social reality (65).

This developing "new science" of which chaos theory and feminist scholarship are integral parts "is for the first time in history focusing more on relationships than hierarchies" (Eisler, 191).

Interestingly, chaos theory has had to overcome many of the same impediments that other disempowered groups have confronted in order to establish itself as a viable alternative explanation. Glieck describes the process as one of revolution where a new science arises out of one that has reached "a dead end." The revolution, he describes, has an interdisciplinary character where:

...its central discoveries often come from people straying outside the normal bounds of their specialities. The problems that obsess these theorists are not recognized as legitimate lines of inquiry.

In addition, there are a number of characteristics of chaos theory which parallel that of the disempowered groups. The first is an orientation toward holistic thinking. Physicist Fritjof Capra states that this more holistic approach is a "radical departure from much of Western science, which has been characterized by a hierarchic, overcompartmentalized, and often mechanistic approach" (Eisler, 191).

A bit less obvious in chaos theory is a renewed appreciation for intuition and individualized knowledge. "The revolution in chaos applies to the universe we see and touch, to objects at human scale. Everyday experience and real pictures of the world have become legitimate targets for inquiry (6).

We have found, through our investigation into the disempowered paradigm, many links between feminist theory, gylanic theory, chaos, theory, black contemporary thought, and critical theory but let us state for the record that we believe that feminist theory is the core of the "disempowered paradigm." There are many characteristics of the disempowered paradigm which rose from the rejection of women's experiences and women's views. Within the communication field, the feminist perspective holds a deep commitment to the study of gender as a critical component of all dimensions of culture and not just another variable. Yet some feminist scholars are beginning to view gender as one of many forms of oppression. For example, Cheris Kramarae has written on the interconnectedness of gender, to race, age, class, and social background (1988). Julia Wood states a similar theme in an essay published in Women's Studies in Communication in which she wrote, feminist scholars "like all social actors, are constrained by the rules, expectations, and definitions set forth and sustained by the dominant social order (24). So Wood asks, Is the concern of feminist scholarship, women, gender or oppression?"

Treichler and Wartella state this same position in an article published in Communication:

we are here concerned with the nature of representation, with sexual difference and identity, with the relationship of ideology and material conditions, with the relationship between the personal and political, with the ultimate subjectivity of all research, with our ongoing functioning within patriarchy, and with the crucial intersections of race, class, ethnic background, and gender (12)."

Karen Altman, in "Conversing at the Margins: A Polemic, or Feminism and Communication Studies," states that:

Feminism articulates power relations among human actors or subjects, analyzes the politics of the body, the text, and transnational corporate expansion, and features class, race, and sexual preference in addition to gender as sites of struggle over language, meaning, power, or knowledge.

In fact, we are more likely to see the inclusion of other forms of oppression by feminist scholars than we are to see the inclusion of women in critical studies, black studies or chaos theory. As Eisler states:

the only ideology that frontally challenges this model (scientific/dominator) of human relations, as well as the principle of human ranking based on violence, is, of course, feminism. For this reason, it occupies a unique position both in modern history and in the history of our cultural revolution (164).

While an integral part, feminist thought does not alone constitute the disempowered paradigm. The inclusion of gender alone as the center of analysis is the primary difference. In addition, the disempowered paradigm views the construction of language and its use to eliminate competing points of view as an important aspect of study (i.e. Ardeners "Muted Group" perspective).

CONCLUSION

Each perspective we have discussed, fights to define and retain their own territory yet it is our position that their territories overlap and when taken together, form a "disempowered paradigm." In fact, it is our view that these innovators, when they have agreed upon goals, could easily upend the present "empowered paradigm." Eisler (136) states that "if the system is stable, the new mode of functioning represented by these fluctuations will not survive. But if these "innovators" multiply fast enough, the whole system may adopt a new mode of functioning."

There is a fear of co-optation and it is a legitimate fear. Part of the strength of the scientific paradigm is its built in defense mechanisms. One of which is its tendency to water down and sanitize an adversarial position and make it its own. Another defense mechanism is the way in which the empowered paradigm taints the data obtained. As Eisler states, the greatest obstacle to the

accurate reconstruction of prehistory is not that we are lacking so many pieces; it is that the prevailing paradigm makes it so hard to accurately interpret the pieces we have to project the real pattern in which they fit (29).

The language, as we stated earlier, is a large deterrent to the explanation of any position but that held by the "empowered paradigm." In addition, the rules enforced by the empowered paradigm prevent any but another "competing" paradigm from entering the arena. For example, part of the "disempowered paradigm" is its acceptance of other paradigms - of other ways of thinking and viewing. Therefore, the "disempowered paradigm"

could, indeed, live side by side with the "empowered" but the empowered paradigm leaves no room in its domain for other competing paradigms. Stalelated positions are unacceptable in the present paradigm. Some one must be a winner. Therefore, the disempowered can not exist.

The hold we currently have on these ideas is tenuous. It seems that a paradigm in its infancy is a fragile fleeting thing and it easy prey for critics. It requires a great deal of nurturing and perhaps faith on the part of its adherents.

In the field of communication, the acceptance of the disempowered paradigm would see a myriad of radical changes in all areas of study. At present, it is not possible, nor is is necessary for us to go into it in depth but let us say that we are personally interested in the way(s) in which the disempowered paradigm affect the study of mass communication effects research, public policy making, argumentation, and relational communication to name a few.

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